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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

STYLES IN FURNITURE.

BY FREDERICK B. DEBERARD.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY in the fifteenth century the architects and artists of Italy abandoned the use of Gothic construction and ornament, never thoroughly acclimated in that country, and returned at a stride to the classic models among whose ruins they lived and whose influence they had always felt. There

was little of the transitional period which usually marks the decadence of an old style and ushers in a new one; the overturning of Gothic inspirations was sudden and complete, and the picturesque and irregular grouping, the free, vigorous and irregular ornament of that style was abandoned for the symmetry and repetition of the Roman school, whose traditions had never entirely died out.

So complete was the change that only a few years after its beginning some of the most important buildings of Italy, the great palaces of Florence, were begun and finished without a trace of Gothic influence; and although in some others a free

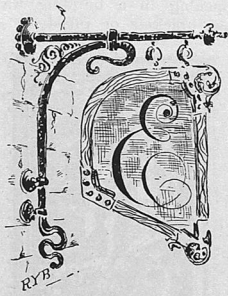


FIG. 1.—PALAZZO SANSONNIO.

and somewhat unsymmetrical outline showed an attachment to Gothic picturesqueness of grouping, the ornament was almost purely classical in motive.

In other countries the change was neither so radical nor so rapid. France was the first to feel its influence, but it was a hundred years after the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy before it obtained a firm foothold in France, whither its influence had travelled with the returning armies of Charles VIII. and Francis I. It did not meet with such ready nor complete acceptance there as in Italy. Its type was neither so fine, so



FIG. 2.—PALAZZO URBINO.

conventional, nor so refined as south of the Alps; the Gothic feeling had too much vigor to readily succumb; and as a result the earliest and best examples of French Renaissance were picturesque comminglings of Gothic groupings and proportions with

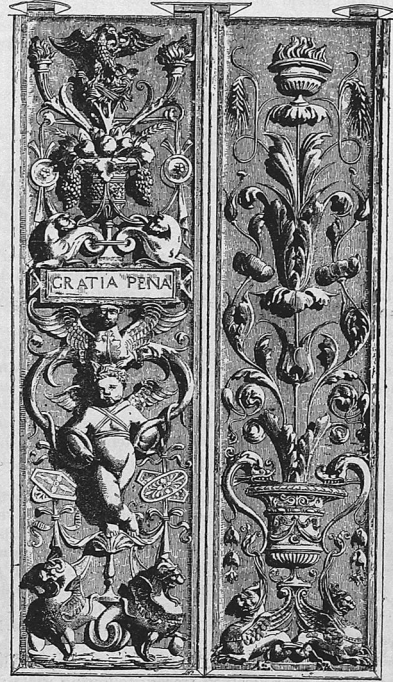


FIG. 3.—CATHEDRAL OF SIENNA.

freely rendered classic ornament, the latter losing in delicacy and conventionality but gaining in spirit and vigor.

Passing into Flanders, the Classic revival was modified still more, and a distinct type of ornament was evolved, based upon Italian motives indeed, but so rough and strong as to have little in common with its prototype. It was from Flanders and Hol-



FIG. 4.—FROM THE CHURCH OF SAINTE TRINITE AT FLORENCE.

land, with which its relations were close, that England early in the sixteenth century got its models in architecture and furni-

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ture; but here the sturdy national type was modified but little, and more than a hundred years passed before a building of unequivocal Italian type found a place in England. During that century in England domestic architecture changed more than public architecture; and woodwork more than either. This was the transition period in England, where the sound structural

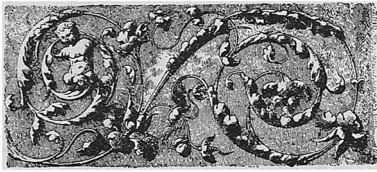


FIG. 5.—HOUSE OF AGNES SOREL AT ORLEANS.

qualities and the directness of Gothic woodwork were united with and beautified by ornament at once vigorous and refined, in which Classic grace and Gothic strength and individuality were happily combined.

It is to this transition period, in France and in England, that we must look for the best examples of design in wood-work, and this series of articles will trace the early Renaissance styles of France and England—the Francis Premier, the Henri Deux, the Jacobean, the Elizabethan—with some particularity. At present, however, a few examples of ornamental details will serve to point the tendencies of the various styles of early Renaissance on the Continent.



FIG. 6.
HOUSE OF FRANCIS I. OF
ORLEANS.

The earlier examples of Renaissance in Italy were characterized by severity and stateliness. The ornament was subdued and sparingly applied, Greek restraint rather than Roman floridness was aimed at, and a type of the ornament thus applied sparingly to give variety to large blank spaces is shown by Fig. 1, a portion of a frieze from the Palazzo Sansonno. Here the Greek honeysuckle, surrounded by delicate and restrained tracery following well-fixed classic lines—is the leading motive. There is a suggestion of foliation and an unobtrusive use of the Roman rosettes; but on the whole, the restraint of the composition is in marked contrast to the riotous freedom of a later date. The panel, Fig. 2, from the Palazzo Urbino, shows in much stronger tendency toward Roman exuberance, combined with original forms and groupings—a tendency still more marked in the panels from the Cathedral of Sienna, Fig. 3. In one of these, flowing lines and graceful foliation are still relied upon; but in the other, they have almost disappeared, and a florid grouping of conventional figures arranged somewhat after the manner of the Roman trophies have taken their place.

By this time exceedingly elaborate ornamentation had taken the place of the earlier restraint, and both architecture, and

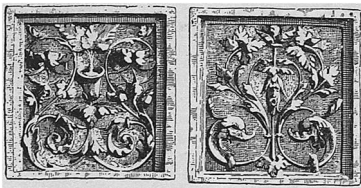


FIG. 8.
CATHEDRAL OF LIMOGES.

FIG. 9.

woodwork which imitated architecture, were rapidly becoming vehicles, whose most apparent purpose was the support and dis-

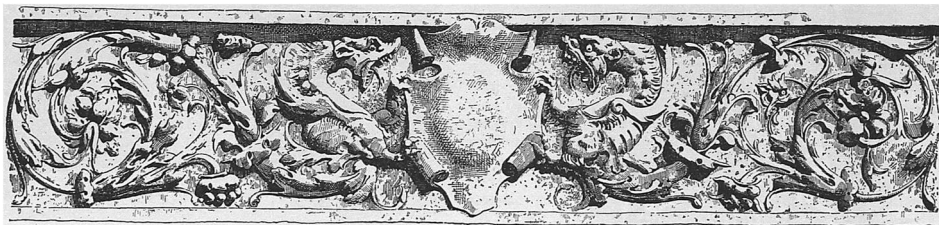


FIG. 7.—CATHEDRAL OF BOURGES.

play of endless ornament. Every opening in a building was marked by a pediment supported upon brackets or pilasters; a plain surface of wall was absorbed: pilasters or columns were carried up between the window openings and rich friezes, and cornices carried as much ornament as could be carved upon them. Assuming great importance in their ornamental function, all these members were finally greatly elaborated; and these features of architecture were reproduced in the wood-work of the day.

Columns naturally afforded great opportunity for decorative effect—an opportunity which the spirited and original artists of the perfected Renaissance eagerly seized; and in consequence we find some exceedingly striking and characteristic ornament, not merely in the panels of pilasters—a position where their use had a precedent in Roman practice—but also in the shafts of columns, which were not merely ornamented with a modest band beneath the capital, but were covered with ornament from the capital to a point not far above the base, a method of treatment illustrated in Fig. 4, from the Church of Sainté Trinité at Florence. The completeness with which the artists of Italy had



FIG. 10.
HOTEL DE VILLE, OUDENARDE.

given way during the first century of the Renaissance to their passion for balanced or symmetrical ornament is well shown by this example, which is a capital specimen of the successful combination of grotesque figures with exceedingly graceful and subtle curved and foliated designs.

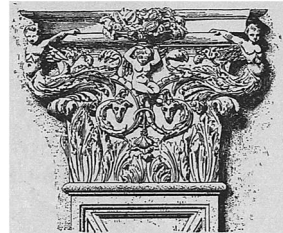
This method of treating columns was a favorite one with Renaissance architects, and much ingenuity was displayed in securing ingenious variations upon the simple, plain or fluted shafts of the ancients, a fact which will become more evident as we enter upon a closer study of early French work.

The numerous Italian artists whom Francis I. invited into France to assist in the building and ornamenting of the Chateaux Chambord and Blois, the Palace



FIG. 11.
HOTEL DE VILLE, OUDENARDE.

of Fontainebleau and other structures which that monarch and his nobles built, brought with them their native sense of delicacy and grace; but a new and beautiful element is recognizable in the employment as terminals in arabesque ornaments of cherubic and French forms, whose contour is less chubby and more pleasing than those common in Italian work. Whether this difference is due to French influence or is the result of superior artistic ability on the part of some one of Francis's Italian protégés is not easy to determine, but it is readily noted in Figs. 5 and 6, where the delicate lines of Italian tracery are heightened by their combination with exqui-



CHURCH OF ST. EUSTACHE, PARIS.

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site figures. A similar treatment is seen in Fig. 7, a capital from the Church of St. Eustache, built by Francis I., and one of the best examples of the architecture of his day. It will be observed that graceful tenuity is the leading characteristic of most of the examples thus far submitted, and this was at all times a distinguishing feature of Italian Renaissance decoration. The less the sympathy with classic feeling the more marked the absence of this feature; and where the Gothic styles were most vigorous and most firmly rooted we find their modifying influence upon

classic arabesque ornament has caused the latter to gain in sturdiness but lose in refinement. We may observe this slightly in Fig. 7, part of a frieze from the Cathedral of Bourges, which also displays a modest example of cartouche ornament, which ran riot in Flanders, Holland and England; and in Figs. 8 and 9, panels from the Cathedral of Limoges. In Figs. 10 and 11 it is plainly noticeable. The ornament has thickened, the leaves have become chumpy and lost their liquid flow, and the cupids plainly sturdy Dutch youngsters.



DESIGN FOR PLATE, FROM THE GERMAN.